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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM PREL LA](#)

SUBJECT: MURDER OF HMONG MAN IN SAISOMBOUN -- ANOTHER CASE
OF EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING?

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Kristen Bauer, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The murder of a Hmong farmer outside of Muang Cha, the capital of the former Saisomboun Special Zone, on June 8 appears to have been an example of local police eliminating a perceived security threat. Unusually, the government has gone out of its way to report that the motive for the murder was likely a "business dispute." This case highlights that Lao security forces are not against taking matters into their own hands when they identify potential security threats, especially involving the ethnic Hmong. End summary.

¶2. (C) According to a number of Hmong sources, on June 8 a Hmong farmer in the former Saisomboun Special Zone, 34 year-old Xiong Pao Xiong, was shot and killed and his 6-year old son wounded when two policemen confronted them outside Muang Cha. Several Hmong in contact with Xiong Pao Xiong's family members told us that he was a cousin of insurgent leader Wa Meng Lo, who was captured by Lao soldiers in late May along with his family in the Phoubia area of Saisomboun. Xiong Pao Xiong reportedly made several visits to Wa Meng Lo in prison after his capture, perhaps arousing the suspicion of local police.

¶3. (C) According to these same sources, on June 8, just after police had interviewed him at home over the location of his brother, Xiong Pao Xiong and his two sons, ages 6 and 11, drove to the family's rice fields outside of Muang Cha. Witnesses reported that as Xiong was leaving his vehicle, two policemen pulled up in separate unmarked cars, walked up to Xiong and shot him in the head. One of the policeman then shot the 6-year old boy, who was still sitting in the car. The older boy jumped out of the passenger side of the vehicle and ran away. The policemen returned to their cars and drove off.

¶4. (C) Several farmers who witnessed the shooting ran to the scene and contacted Xiong's wife and cousins in Muang Cha. Although Xiong was dead, his son was still alive and several cousins who arrived at the scene a short time later took him to the hospital in Muang Cha. Family members said staff at the hospital refused to admit him. As a result, the family had to transport the severely injured boy to Vientiane, three hours away. Surgeons at Vientiane's Mahosot Hospital operated on the boy, whose lung had been pierced by a bullet, saving his life.

¶5. (C) We were able to confirm most details of this story with doctors at the Mahosot Hospital and with UNICEF staff,

who learned of the shooting and kept close tabs on the boy during his stay in the hospital. We and others in the UN and diplomatic community who followed the case did not raise it with the GoL out of fear the authorities would retaliate against Xiong Pao Xiong's family. Unusually, however, on June 21 the Lao press reported the shooting in some detail, saying the killers were "unknown assailants" who shot Xiong Pao Xiong and his son as they were walking to their fields. Press articles went on to say police found \$2,000 at the scene, that the killers had taken an AK-47 from Xiong's car, and that police believed the motive for the murder was a business dispute or "illegal trading."

16. (C) Comment: Murders in Laos are by no means uncommon, but rarely are they reported in the press. Xiong Pao Xiong's death has generated an unusual level of interest within the Hmong community, in large part because witnesses at the scene identified police as the killers. The Hmong we have spoken with assumed police killed him because of his connections to insurgent leader Wa Meng Lo. It appears that the government, recognizing the presumption that police killed Xiong, decided to put out their own version of events in order to throw the public off the track. Our own read of the incident is that this was most likely an extrajudicial killing conducted by Saisomboun police to eliminate someone they regarded as too close to the insurgency. Taken with other similar incidents in the past several years targeting ethnic Hmong, it reveals the Lao authorities retain a high degree of suspicion toward the Hmong community and are not above resorting to murder to eliminate those they see as threats to security. End comment.
BAUER